

Cross-border cooperation between nongovernmental organisations in the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships

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**CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION
BETWEEN
NONGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS
IN THE POMERANIAN
AND WARMIAN-MASURIAN
VOIVODESHIPS**

Chr. Gomulka^{*}



This article is devoted to the issues of cross-border cooperation carried out by agents resident in the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships. Among such agents there are non-governmental organizations. This article aims to identify the role of NGOs in cross-border cooperation and the predominant fields of their cooperation, as well as to assess their activity in attracting funding from European budgets. The article widely applies the results of surveys of NGOs conducted by the author, compares the results of performance reports submitted by these organisations within international projects, and offers the data presented in relevant publications (Euroregion Baltic documents and Phare CBC reports, Interreg IIIA and, Interreg IIIB, NMF, and Polish-Swiss Cooperation reports, as well as the data of the Central Department of Statistics). The research covers the period from the late 90s to 2012. The article highlights the difficulties agents face in forging and implementing cross-border cooperation, resulting from the mismatching definitions of the tertiary sector in Poland's neighbour states.

Key words: trans-border cooperation, voivodeship, non-governmental organization, international partners, EU programmes, Euroregion Baltic

The EU Glossary defines trans-border cooperation as “neighbour cooperation in all areas of life between bordering regions and regional authorities or any other authorities in trans-border regions” [1, s. 15]. The concept of trans-border cooperation acquired its importance after WWII in the western European countries. Their governments began taking effort in eliminating irreversible contradictions between the states and peoples by the end of the war. Regional self-governing units, entrepreneurs and various organizations became major subjects of cooperation. In the early 90's of the 20th century, this field

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expanded due to other players, including NGOs. The objective of the article is to identify their role and major areas of their activities, and to assess the level of their interest in obtaining European funding.

Research conducted by Beata Samoilovitch and Eva Romanowska shows that 6.9 % of Polish NGOs acknowledge international cooperation, including trans-border cooperation, as one of the three major types of activities [2, s. 67—68]. In 2010, the Polish register *Regon* included 71,000 organizations, 12,000 funds, and 16,000 volunteer firefighting units [15]. The highest NGO-population ratio was registered in Mazovia, Lower Silesian Voivodeship, Pomeranian, Warmian-Mazurian, Lublin and West Pomeranian voivodeships. According to Jadviga Przewlocka, among several fields of activity, the Polish tertiary¹ sector was mostly bustling in sports, recreation, tourism and hobbies. In 2010 these activities made up 53 % of the total number of functioning organizations; 15 % of NGOs were engaged in education and childcare, 14 % in culture and arts, 7 % focused on social assistance; the same number of NGOs dealt with healthcare; 5 % focused on local development in Poland [16]. The majority of NGOs (88 %) were set up to support some individuals (physical entities). More than half (62 %) of those NGOs were active in the voivodships where they were registered, while only 30 % performed at the international or national level. NGOs predominantly functioned in the major cities, fewer worked in smaller towns. The average annual income of such organizations amounted to 20,000 zł. Only 5 % of NGOs, which as a rule functioned in major cities, reported a higher income — over one million zł. Their revenues were made up by membership fees, donations and funds from self-governing authorities. A big part of the income (38 %) in 2010 came as subsidies from local authorities or the state budget. The NGOs from smaller towns ran due to funding from local authorities. Many organizations and foundations did not have any financial backing and faced some problems with financial liquidity. Then it became dramatically important for them to attract EU funding, which was decisive for the organizations working in trans-border territories. In the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships this cooperation is seen as a priority.

The Pomeranian voivodeship is located in northern Poland. Its total land area is 18,310.34 km². By December 31, 2011 it registered 2, 283, 500 people [17]. The Strategy of Social and Economic development of the Voivodeship states that “the Pomeranian Voivodeship is an open region involved into international cooperation” [18]. The Strategy asserts the Voivodeship’s widening presence in the area of international and trans-border cooperation; it is

¹ The tertiary sector is a collective name for NGOs. This term refers to the separation of social and economic activities into three sectors in the modern world. Thus, the first sector is national and local administration, defined sometimes as state or public sector. The secondary sector is business, or institutions and organizations whose activities make profit, or the private sector. The tertiary sector comprises private socially oriented and non-profit organizations, or non-governmental, non-commercial organizations.

supported by a growing number of agreements on trans-border cooperation signed by the local self-governing authorities and NGOs.

The Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury is located in north-eastern Poland. Its total area is 24,173. 24 km². By December 31, 2011 the voivodeship registered 1, 452,596 people. The Strategy of Social and Economic development emphasizes the necessity to widen trans-border and interregional cooperation with the Kaliningrad region, the Baltic Sea states, the other countries bordering on Poland, as well as with some other regions [20]. The same as the Pomeranian Voivodeship Strategy, the most active cooperation participants were identified as local self-governing authorities and NGOs. By the end of 2010, 3,906 and 2,354 NGOs were registered the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships respectively [19, p. 7—10].

By the number of NGOs per 10,000 people the Pomeranian Voivodeship ranked second in Poland after the Masovian one [21, p. 3]. The Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury was rated seventh. The NGOs' activities were focused mainly on sports, tourism, recreation and leisure, with their share up to 31, 8 %. They held sports and touristic events, maintained sports facilities. Their hobby-oriented activities were mostly connected with support to various interest clubs [Ibid., p. 14]. Second in size came the organizations in social services and public assistance [Ibid., p. 15]. They supported sick and disabled people, as well as the families with financial problems and the victims of family abuse. The Pomeranian voivodeship reported by far fewer organizations in the field of education, healthcare, art and culture, local development and environment.

In the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury the largest number of organizations worked in sports, tourism, recreation and leisure (30,3 %). The lesser part of them focused on education, social services and healthcare. However, the same voivodeship registered 10 % of NGOs in local development area, Poland's highest figure of NGOs in this field.

A different situation can be witnessed in the countries bordering on Poland, including the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. In this region NGOs are regulated according to several laws: the Constitution of the Russian Federation (art.30), the law "On Non-governmental Organizations" (of 19.05.1995), the Federal Law "On Non-commercial Organisations" (of 12.01.1996), and the law "On Some Amendments to the Legal Acts of the Russian Federation" (of 10.01.2006) [3, c. 34]. According to the above-mentioned laws, NGOs are classified into funds, public corporations, non-commercial partnerships, institutions, autonomous non-commercial organizations and the unions of legal entities.

In the Kaliningrad region the interest to such organizations started growing in the early 21st century. However, due to the fact that the Russian legislation treats professional unions and parties as NGOs, it is still difficult to identify the number of organizations acting in the region. Given that, the number of NGOs reached over 1000 in the region, though many of them were not functioning. Among the Kaliningrad region's NGOs I. Dementiev mentions female clubs, cultural societies, children's and youth clubs, ethnic societies, immigrant societies, social organizations, societies for people with

disabilities, and environmental organizations [22]². Many of them are the branches of Russian national organizations. Over half of these NGOs are located in Kaliningrad. They predominantly get financed from abroad: UNICEF, European Commission, RITA Programme [23], foreign embassies' funds, including Polish funds, like the Stefan Batory Foundation [24]. Russian NGOs can hardly find support from Russian business people, because the Russian legislation does not grant any tax benefits to entrepreneurs [24]. Moreover, such organizations are lacking in staff, many of them are not aware of their counterparts functioning in the region and abroad [25].

In Lithuania NGOs include non-commercial organizations and trade unions. In 2005 they totalled 9, 6296, but their number fell to 7,570 when religious and public organizations were excluded from NGO lists [26]. As for their activity areas, the better part of Lithuanian organizations focuses on increasing living standards and support to the needy people. The highest number of NGOs functions in Vilnius and its suburbs. They are less numerous in the Klaipėda district.

The European legislation does not dictate any universal rules for creating and running NGOs, therefore their competences differ widely across Europe. A characteristic feature for EU countries is establishing "umbrella" organizations³ [27]. EU institutions annually support NGOs with non-interest loans and subsidies allocated for their major activities.

Sweden shows quite a specific situation. There are many NGOs there, however, no definition of such. Swedish legislation identifies NGOs in social and ideological societies, consumer, sports, religious and agricultural organizations, organizations for disabled people, retired, immigrant, environmental organizations, trade unions and political parties. The Swedish government allocates about 4 % of GDP to these institutions. The widest activity area is social security for Swedish citizens and immigrants, education and sport [28].

In Denmark, NGOs are set up according to similar rules. They function mainly in social assistance, education and teaching, and are funded by the government. Their number reaches 8, 200 [29].

Trans-border cooperation between the NGOs of the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships and neighbouring countries was developing actively at the turn of the 21st century due to joint implementation of the so-called soft projects⁴. The Phare Programme was considered one of the most efficient instruments of financial support. Phare Tacis, created within its frameworks, set the objectives to develop cross-border cooperation be-

² There are 789 organisations registered in the Russian enclave, The Department of the Ministry of Justice of the RF in the Kaliningrad region, available at URL: http://www.klguprminjust.ru/structure_48 (accessed 12 November 2012).

³ Non-commercial union, the members of which are legal entities (including the organizations of public commercial and tertiary sector), set up to encourage their common interests. "Umbrella organizations" can function on the international, regional and local levels.

⁴ A "soft" project is designed for consulting, expert training, necessary training equipment, and pilot projects.

tween CIS and Central and Eastern Europe [5, s. 217—231]. Those countries could use the resources of the Soft Project Fund (SPF) Phare CBC. A number of projects were implemented in the two voevodships within the framework of the Baltica euro-region — one of the most active euro-regions with 232 soft projects completed (215 according to I. Navrocka) [4, p. 31—34; 6, p. 112—113]. The priority objectives included cultural exchange, local democratic development, human resources development, cross-border development and concepts, public development and tourism in cross-border territories. At the beginning all the neighbouring regions were involved in joint projects, but since 2001 it has been mainly the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. Bilateral cooperation became the background for 128 Polish-Russian, 21 Polish-Swedish, six Polish-Lithuanian, 24 Polish-Danish and one Polish-Estonian project [4, s. 6; 7, s. 291]. Multilateral projects were much fewer in number (52). The beneficiaries of the Phare Programme are given in Table 1.

Table 1

**“Phare” Programme beneficiaries from the Pomeranian
and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships**

Beneficiary	% projects
Self-governing authorities	32,0
Gminas unions	4,2
Cultural institutions	15,7
Non-governmental organizations	25,0
Schools	7,4
Sports clubs	3,2
Social support institutions	4,2
Economic self-governing	2,3
Research institutions	1,4
Other	4,6

Source: the author’s analysis of [4].

Table 1 shows that the highest number of projects was completed by the self-governing authorities of both voivodeships (75), and by the NGOs (58). 35 projects were implemented together with Russian partners, others with Swedish and Danish ones. Polish NGOs rarely chose Lithuanian or Latvian partners; several projects were implemented multilaterally [8—10]. Out of 56 projects implemented by NGOs, 38 were aimed at cultural exchange and human resources development (nine projects). In the area of cultural exchange the majority of projects were carried out together with Russia, Lithuania and Latvia. With Swedes and Danes, cooperation predominantly focused on environmental protection [11, p. 13—14; 12, p. 41]. Polish NGOs leaned from Nordic experience and accepted new approaches in such an important matter as environmental protection. NGOs of the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

**Polish non-governmental organizations of the Pomeranian
and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships implementing projects
under “Phare CBC”**

NGO	Location	Number of implemented projects
Slupsk NGO support center	Slupsk	1
Cultural society <i>Viva art</i>	Elblang	3
Regional cultural society	Elblang	3
Public support fund <i>Self-support</i>	Gurowo-Ilawecke	1
Youth cultural center	Tczew	1
Society <i>Free enterprise (Wolna Przedsiębiorczość)</i>	Gdansk	1
Society <i>Amber</i>	Ilawa	4
Society for humanitarian integration <i>Pomost</i>	Tczew	3
Education society <i>Natural sciences (Wiedza powszechna)</i>	Gdansk	6
<i>Sequoia</i> Society	Gdansk	1
Culture House Foundation	Tczew	4
Social protection society <i>Bank of open hearts (Bank Otwartych Serc)</i>	Gdansk	2
Foundation <i>Rodowo</i>	Rodowo	1
Elblang society of support to non-governmental initiatives	Elblang	10
Children’s friendship society	Elblang	4
Staroguard’s culture center	Starograd	2
<i>Culture center</i>	Barciany	1
<i>Society Barcianska Education Initiative (Barcianska Inicjatywa Oświatowa)</i>	Barciany	1
Foundation <i>Theatrum Gedanense</i>	Gdansk	1
Foundation <i>Regional center of information and support to NGOs</i>	Gdansk	1
Kwidzyn society for eco-initiatives support	Kwidzyn	1
Dance club <i>Amber</i>	Elblang	1
Fund <i>Village of the XXI century</i>	Pakosze	1
Society of theatrical culture	Elblang	1
Center of environmental education	Kwidzin	1
The House of meetings and reunification	Gdansk	1
Ultural society <i>Borussia</i>	Olsztyn	1
<i>Total</i>		56

Source: the author’s analysis of: [8—10]⁵.

As Table 2 shows, 27 projects were implemented by the NGOs in the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury, and 29 projects — by the NGOs of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Gdansk and Elblang NGOs were by far the most

⁵ The list of projects implemented with the Fund of Minor Projects [9] in 1998—2006.

active; the latter appeared second to none in getting EU funds and implementing the tasks of cross-border cooperation.

Non-governmental organizations from both voivodships actively participated in the Seagull II programme, which aimed at preparing these regions for implementing the joint development project. Within the frameworks of the Seagull Programme they held two conferences where partners learnt new border-crossing regulations determined by Poland's access to the European Union. The major beneficiaries of the programme were the Marshal departments of Pomor and Warmian and Mazury Voivodships, which together with Euroregion Baltic attracted NGOs to cooperate [30]. It resulted in several dozens of foreign partners who joined in the cooperation, including 21 Polish NGOs [31, s. 51]. The final implementation report of the Interreg IIIB Programme mentioned that the participating NGOs represented mainly the Voivodship of Warmia and Mazury (Elblang and Olsztyn) [Ibid., s. 26]. Those NGOs concentrated on public development issues and environmental protection. The highest degree of activity was shown by the Agencies of regional development from Gdansk and Elblang, the Elblang society for non-governmental initiative support, and the Latvian Agency of Kurzeme regional development [30].

The "Culture and Arts" project conducted within the framework of Interreg IIIA Programme became the space for Polish and Russian NGOs cooperation (it was implemented from July 2006 till December 2007). It aimed at establishing cultural cooperation between the Kaliningrad region and Poland. The project focused on three main areas: education, information and strategy. Research conducted in the education area showed the urgency for the cultural institutions to cooperate with their counterparts from the Kaliningrad region. Moreover, it revealed the need for retraining and launched a Culture management course, which was attended by 59 people, 24 of whom represented cultural NGOs of the Kaliningrad region and 35 — their Polish partners [13]. They also joined the discussion forum to develop the strategy of trans-border cooperation on cultural issues. It resulted in creating a specialized database in the partner languages on legal regulations for NGOs in Poland and the Russian Federation.

The trans-border cooperation on cultural issues was supposed to involve the majority of towns in the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodships and the whole of the Kaliningrad region [14]. In part, those plans were implemented in the local projects, within the framework of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism through the Fund of Minor trans-border and interregional grants, with the co-participation of Euroregion Baltic. Among the assisted priorities were: building public capacities and establishing sustainable cooperation in trans-border ecotourism, healthcare, knowledge transfer from more advanced regions, regional and local development, and staff training. All the projects were supposed to involve foreign participation, non-profit organizations from EACT countries, the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Belarus and the Baltic Sea countries. In total, 52 projects were fulfilled. NGOs from the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodships carried out 19 out of 52 projects [8—10]. The beneficiaries of the project are given in Table 3.

Table 3

**Non-governmental organizations of the Pomeranian
and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships implementing projects financed
through Minor trans-border and interregional grants**

Organization	Location	Number of projects
Association <i>Platform</i> (Stowarzyszenie <i>Pomost</i>)	Tczew	2
European Fund for memorials preservation	Gdansk	2
Elblang Society for non-governmental initiative support	Elblang	3
Człuchów and Chojnice development fund	Chłukhow	1
Fund <i>Regional center for information support for NGOs</i>	Gdansk	1
Eco-initiative society	Kwidzyn	2
Local task force (<i>South Warmia</i>)	Barchewo	1
Society of supporters to Nowy Dwor Gdansk	Novy Dvor	1
Center of culture and local activities	Byshtynek	1
Center of education and cultural initiatives	Olsztyn	1
Caritas of the Archbishop of Warmia	Olsztyn	1
The Polish Scouting and Guiding Association	Elblang	1
Society of children's friendship	Gdansk	2
<i>Total</i>		19

Source: the author's analysis of: [8—10]⁶.

As shown in Table 3, the most of the projects were implemented by the Pomeranian Voivodeship's NGOs. Thematically, the projects were predominantly focused on strengthening and developing trans-border cooperation on local and regional levels in the spheres of culture, public issues, eco-tourism and entrepreneurship. The foreign partners included Russians, who participated in 14 projects, Germans — two projects, Danes — one project, Swedes — one project and Lithuanians — one project [8—10].

Poland's accession to the Polish-Swiss Cooperation Programme played a particular role for NGO trans-border cooperation. Its aim was to overcome the gap between economic and public disparities of Poland and EU countries, between dynamically developing urban areas and less developed regions, through establishing partnerships between local authorities and public organizations.

There are two funds functioning within the framework of the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme: the NGO Fund and the Partnership Fund. The objective of the former is to support public activity, facilitate civil society development and bridge the gap between Poland and EU countries. Under this fund NGOs can implement the projects encouraging active public involvement in civil society, meeting local public challenges, promoting law enforcement, searching for new solutions, and sharing experience [32]. The

⁶ The materials of Euroregion Baltic, the list of projects implemented with the Norwegian Financial Mechanism in 2009—2011.

areas covered are: 1) raising civil awareness; 2) activities aiming to sustain democratic approaches to public control over authorities and public institutions, anti-corruption measures, monitoring of political promises on local and regional levels; 3) involvement into local political life through public consulting and political benchmarking in holding debates, referendums, petitions, legal initiatives, public administration quality assurance [33]. In 2011—2012 NGOs attracted funds on major and minor projects it two transfers. Foreign participation added value to the project at the application stage. NGOs from EU countries or Switzerland could participate as partners.

Grant competition for post-financing of major projects brought six NGOs from both voivodeships though none of them was able to receive funding. First and second rounds of grant competition for post-financing of minor projects attracted 11 NGOs from the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships. Finally, two projects presented by the Fund of Professional Activities of Gdansk and Olsztyn KOFE(M)INA Society were approved for implementation [34].

The Fund of Professional Activities of Gdansk deals with disabled homeless, and unemployed people, children and women [35]. In the context of the Polish-Swiss Cooperation Programme the fund carried out the projects supporting people with disabilities. Austrian and Swiss NGOs functioned as partners in both projects.

The KOFE(M)INA Society was set up to promote ideas of equality, counter discrimination and raise people's awareness. Its manifested objectives relate to feminist principles, integrating forces dealing with gender inequalities, activities to promote equality irrespective of gender, skin color, ethnicity, religion or social status. The Programme became the background for the project "Active — equal — effective", which involved people working in public authorities of Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury [36].

Most NGOs functioning in the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships appeared in late 90s. They predominantly worked with cultural and public issues, trying to solve the most urgent problems in those fields. Only some of them managed to find a foreign partner and completed trans-border cooperation tasks with EU funding. A specific character of the Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian voivodeships revealed itself in Belorussian, Ukrainian and German minorities who rarely tried to make use of EU funds and initiate trans-border cooperation.

Location-wise, a greater number of NGOs functioned in major cities like Gdansk, Sopot, Gdynia, Olsztyn and Elblang. By far fewer NGOs were concentrated in small towns of both voivodeships, which nevertheless did not prevent them from competing for EU funds.

NGOs from Pomeranian and Warmia and Mazury Voivodeships cooperated with the foreign partners who were located in some close vicinity. Quite often the Kaliningrad region came forth as a foreign partner, while on the Polish side Warmia and Mazury NGOs were most active. Polish and Russian partners cooperated primarily in education, cultural exchange, and social assistance. They held seminars, conferences, trainings, master-classes, study visits, exhibitions, and created databases.

Some non-governmental organizations of both voivodeships did not attract EU funds but addressed other financial sources, like RITA Program of Polish-American Freedom fund, the Prime-Minister's Office, the Stefan Batory Foundation. The latter post-financed the *Changes in the region* project, launched grant competition for NGOs cooperating with eastern partners, organized study visits for Polish and Russian students, published a collection of maps of NGOs, and created NGO databases [37].

Among the busiest NGOs is the Elblang society for supporting non-governmental initiatives whose main objective is facilitating civil society. In 2002 the Society served as background for the Office of international cooperation whose aim was to support NGOs in Warmian-Mazurian Voivodeships in establishing links with international organizations, the Kaliningrad region included. About 70 organizations from the Pomeranian and Warmian-Mazurian voivodeships formed such links under this office's umbrella. [38]. The Office itself implemented 30 projects in the frameworks of trans-border cooperation with the support of the Program Phare CBC Fund, Norway Financial Mechanism and other financial instruments. The majority of the projects focus on cultural support, training in euro-project application, and sharing Polish experience in administrative reform. The activities of the Elblang Society for NGO initiative support in the Kaliningrad region were post-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Fund, the Education for Democracy Foundation, Polish Prime-Minister's Office, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Marshall's Office of the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury.

Much effort to strengthen the tertiary sector in the Kaliningrad region was made by the Cultural society *Borussia*, which assisted in training Russian NGO leaders through various projects like *Tertiary sector without borders*, *United by democracy*, and *Intrust* [39].

The Gdansk Education Fund implemented 11 international projects, with only one of them EU-funded. Others were financed through various alternative sources like the American Freedom Fund. The best-known projects are *School open to the world* and *Slavic soul in Europe*, which were carried out together with Kaliningrad partners. [40]. Those projects introduced the Polish system of education to Russians, and presented the organizations dealing with issues in this field. By way of assisting the NGOs which embark upon cooperation with foreign partners, the Stefan Batory Fund opened the possibility to conclude agreements on co-financing tri-lateral projects with Polish, Russian and German participants, if they focus on preventing and treating addictions, encouraging the involvement of unemployed, environmental protection or environmental education. Kaliningrad NGOs also received the *Zebra* project, co-financed by the Robert Bosch Fund and lead by the Stefan Batory Foundation [41].

EU funding made it possible for many NGOs like the *Viva Art* Cultural Society or the Regional Cultural Society, the *Platform* Association to succeed in trans-border cooperation. When the number of applications in the 90s is compared to the number of NGOs currently attracting funds, the interest in financing becomes noticeable. In the 90s, a greater part of projects were implemented within the framework of the Phare CBC Programme. The

Culture and Arts Project only involved about 20 NGOs. The Nordic Financial Mechanism provided trans-border cooperation for 19 organizations. Only three NGOs used financial support of the Polish-Swiss Cooperation Programme.

During the entire examined period the NGOs from the Pomeranian voivodeship showed the highest degree of activity in attracting funds. Thematically, in trans-border cooperation dominated cultural, public and environmental protection issues. In mid-term project applications for the EU post-financing, the organizations tried to attract alternative sources, such as funds, self-governing authorities, Marshalls' departments, the Polish Prime-Minister's Office, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The primary cooperation partner is the Kaliningrad region, which can be explained by its geographic proximity. Other states were not sufficiently involved in trans-border cooperation and joint activities.

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